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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7521
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1222
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8638
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2457
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9260
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 005025

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TAGS: [BG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: BOUCHER DISCUSSES ELECTIONS, EXTREMISM AND
REGIONAL RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN POLICY OFFICIALS

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, reason para 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On August 3, A/S Boucher met separately with Acting Foreign Secretary Moniruzzman and Reaz Rahman, the Prime Minister's Advisor for Foreign Affairs Rahman acknowledged concerns about the Chief Election Commissioner's performance but was upbeat on Bangladesh's relationship with India, its struggle to combat extremism, and the fight against corruption. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) With Foreign Minister Khan and Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin called away to accompany Prime Minister Zia to the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit in Malaysia, Acting Foreign Secretary A.H.M. Moniruzzman met with SCA A/S Richard Boucher, Ambassador, and political officer (note taker). At the just concluded South Asian Association Conference ministerial, the United State's request for South Asian Association Conference observer status had been approved, Moniruzzman noted, but he regretted the alleged U.S. view that the organization is weak and limited. He agreed with A/S Boucher's comment that, in terms of potential for free trade, it was akin to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) free trade plans one decade ago.

¶3. (SBU) Moniruzzman asserted that the upcoming elections would be free and fair, citing Bangladesh's three previous elections as a "good history, and a National Democratic Institute study that the voters list is "maintainable." If the Chief Election Commissioner is confident, we are confident, he said.

¶4. (C) Bangladesh has given the U.S. a "blank check" and full cooperation in combating terrorism, he stated. Regarding the Rapid Action Battalion's human rights record, he claimed that inquiries and disciplinary actions have been taken as needed, that crossfire numbers are decreasing, and that the battalion "is highly appreciated in the country." When A/S Boucher noted that in a very high percentage of cases RAB officers are exonerated of any wrongdoing and that crossfires are actually increasing, Moniruzzman replied that Bangladeshis are "very sensitive to any criticism about the Rapid Action Battalion."

¶5. (C) A/S Boucher expressed support for religious minorities like the Ahmadiyas, and U.S. concerns about the grave conditions in the Rohingya refugee camps. Moniruzzman assured A/S Boucher that the Bangladeshi government gives full protection to Ahmadiyyas, and portrayed Bangladesh as a victim of the Rohingya situation since it is forced to support refugees while Bangladeshis themselves are

in need.

¶16. (C) Moniruzzman reiterated Bangladesh's desire for duty-free access to the U.S. garment market, recalling promises supposedly made at Doha that duty-free status would come to Least Developed Countries. A/S Boucher promised that the U.S. has not given up on Doha, and agreed that good performance should be rewarded. He noted that Bangladesh could take steps on its own to improve its business environment and avoiding the sort of transparency problems that plagued Motorola's recent tender for police radios.

¶17. (C) In response to questions on UN reform, Moniruzzman stated that Bangladesh will be an active participant in UN reform debates and that it supports good management principles.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISOR TO THE PRIME MINISTER

8.(C) Asked about relations with India, Reaz Rahman cited Prime Minister Zia's recent visit to New Delhi, denied that Bangladesh is "anti-Indian." There is still a "big neighbor" syndrome, but both countries understand that bilateral dialogue is critical and are prepared to be pragmatic. Both sides, he commented, have a tendency to knee-jerk reactions that need to be controlled.

¶19. (C) Rahman affirmed that Bangladesh is strongly opposed to extremism and that it is moving away from, not towards, fundamentalism, despite foreign perceptions to the contrary. Bangladesh has five key programs for fighting terrorism: a) passing an anti-terrorism

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law, b) passing an anti-money laundering law, c) closing down the sources of arms and explosives, d) positioning counter-terrorism units in key places, and e) maintaining the political will to keep arresting terrorists. In the longer term, poverty reduction is essential to solidify Bangladesh's status as a modern, tolerant society.

¶10. (C) Corruption in Bangladesh is more than just the two to three percent lost is annual economic growth, Rahman said, "it is a vast hydra-headed thing" that Bangladesh is now starting to redress in areas such as labor relations, human rights, the judiciary, and through the new Anti-Corruption Commission. All political parties are committed to anti-corruption by manifesto, and while progress is slow, the movement is in the right direction. Boucher reiterated that pervasive corruption tends to be a great factor in the increase of violence and terrorism, which none would like to see in Bangladesh.

¶11. (C) Rahman identified the keys to democracy as a free media, vocal opposition, and a vibrant civil sector, all of which Bangladesh has. There is slim chance of a true two-party dialogue, but many of the Awami League's electoral reform proposal are either already in place or are wildly unrealistic. The Chief Election Commissioner is not doing a great job, but none of his predecessors were widely accepted either. The Election Commission staff, he maintained, are, however, doing good work.

¶12. (U) A/S Boucher cleared this cable.

GEORGE